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ACTION ARA-16

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 INR-10 SS-15 CIAE-00 ICA-11 DODE-00
H-01 NSC-05 NSAE-00 HA-06 TRSE-00 PM-09 PA-01
ANAE-00 SP-02 SPRS-02 /079 W

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P R 231952Z MAR 81
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8924
INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(☒) Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: () In Part (☒) In Full

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

[REDACTED] BUENOS AIRES 2068

E.O. 12065: GDS 3/23/87 (KEANE, JOHN F.) OR-P
TAGS: PINT, AR

SUBJECT: (U) ISABEL PERON SENTENCED TO EIGHT YEARS IMPRISONMENT

1. (U) IN A DECISION THAT SURPRISED MOST OBSERVERS, FEDERAL JUDGE NORBERTO GILETTA FOUND EX-PRESIDENT ISABEL PERON GUILTY OF MALFEASANCE AND FRAUD ON SEVERAL COUNTS. HE SENTENCED HER TO EIGHT YEARS IN PRISON AND A FINE OF US DOLLARS 1,500,000. SHE IS ALSO PERMANENTLY BARRED FROM HOLDING PUBLIC OFFICE. ACCORDING TO CONFLICTING COURT SOURCES CITED IN THE LOCAL PRESS, THE EARLIEST SHE COULD BE RELEASED ON PAROLE FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR WOULD BE EITHER JULY OR OCTOBER THIS YEAR, BARRING A REVERSAL ON APPEAL, A PARDON BY THE EXECUTIVE, OR A REDUCTION OF THE SENTENCE. APPARENTLY, SHE WILL REMAIN UNDER DETENTION AT HER HOME IN THE BUENOS AIRES SUBURBS.

2. (U) THE JUDGE ALSO CONVICTED THREE OTHER LEADING PERONIST FIGURES IN THE SAME CASE WITH MRS. PERON: CELESTIMO RODRIGO, EX-MINISTER OF ECONOMY; DUILIO BRUNELLO, EXAPERONIST PARTY OFFICIAL; AND NORMA LOPEZ REGA DE LASTIRI, DAUGHTER OF THE FORMER SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTER JOSE LOPEZ REGA. EACH LIKE MRS. PERON WERE FINED US DOLLARS 1.5 MILLION.

3. (U) LEADERS OF THE PERONIST PARTY HAVE CONDEMNED

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THE COURT DECISION, WHICH THEY CHARACTERIZED AS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. ACCORDING TO WIRE SERVICE REPORTS, THE DECISION ALSO SURPRISED OMAR TORRIJOS AND HIS BROTHER HUGO (EX-AMBASSADOR OF PANAMA HERE) WHO HAD MADE ARRANGEMENTS FOR ISABEL TO TRAVEL TO PANAMA AND LIVE THERE FOLLOWING HER RELEASE.

4. [REDACTED] COMMENT: THIS IS A SETBACK FOR PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE VIOLA, WHO TAKES OFFICE NEXT SUNDAY. HE WANTED MRS. PERON FREED PRIOR TO HIS INAUGURATION. AS LONG AS SHE IS UNDER HOUSE ARREST, ANY SELF-RESPECTING PERONIST WILL HAVE GREAT DIFFICULTY IN ASSUMING ANYTHING BUT A CONFRONTATIONALIST STANCE VIS-A-VIS THE GOVERNMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, ISABEL'S CONVICTION AND SENTENCING -- WHICH APPEARS TO HAVE TAKEN ALL POLITICAL SECTORS BY COMPLETE SURPRISE -- WILL PLEASE HARDLINE OPPONENTS OF A POLITICAL THAW, IF INDEED THEY DID NOT HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH JUDGE GILETTA'S DECISION.
SHLAUDEMAN
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